George's PINK PAGES
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Beekeeper Burnout?

In recent articles of Bee Culture and American Bee Journal, some notable beekeepers have written about beekeeper burnout, pointing out that so many beginners start out with great enthusiasm, attend local bee meetings, lose some bees to improper maintenance, failure to treat pests with either correct chemicals or treat at the wrong time, their bees swarm, and they discover much to their chagrin that there is a lot of hard work in the hot, humid summer to produce a saleable crop of honey or a lot of unknown expenses related to properly preparing their honey as gifts to neighbors and friends. These writers imply that people today are no longer really interested in hard physical labor, but rather prefer a computer job with high pay, short hours, in an air conditioned environment. Therefore, the conditions of beekeeping cause so much beekeeper burnout, and we are losing more and more beekeepers and bee colonies. Is this true? If so, does it make a difference? What is so different about beekeeping in 2001 than it was 20 years ago?

Having been a beekeeper in Maryland for almost 70 years, beginning in May,1933, under the direction of Dr. James I. Hambleton, the Chief of the future Beltsville Bee Lab, there were not any great earth shaking bee problems until almost 20 years ago when the tracheal mite was found in 1984, to be followed by the Varroa mite in 1987. If these two mites were not enough misery and confusion to beekeepers and causing 80% losses of bees in many apiaries, in 1990 the Africanized Honey bee entered Texas and now 4 other states, followed by a new disease, Parasitic Mite Syndrome in 1995, the Small Hive Beetle in 98, and the Resistant American Foul Brood disease in 2000. This past 16 years, one problem after another caused some previously successful beekeepers to give up, some new aspiring beekeepers to give up, and many young people looking for a hobby or even training to become a professional honey producer to search for another interest. In those years before the discovery of mites, "newbies" had learned beekeeping from the midst of successful beekeepers at that time, attendance at meetings of the local bee association, and reading some of the pamphlets sent out by bee equipment suppliers. This was a father and son experience, and "on-the-job" training; but this type of learning to be a beekeeper totally disappeared because "Daddy had never seen a mite, an Africanized Honey bee, a small hive beetle or even heard of Apistan, Check-Mite, formic acid or all the other new chemicals, new procedures, new treatments, or new everything". A whole new stage had been set, and the old performers would have to "learn new lines", the beginner would have to start by referring to new books and new articles written by bee scientists, bee researchers, and some enlightened Master beekeepers rather than support the outmoded teachings of the local bee associations which generally are led by one or more of the "old timer successful beekeeper" who unfortunately refused to change their procedures.

Perhaps the most abused new way of doing things is the failure to perform a task or give a treatment at the EXACT TIME with the EXACT quantity of chemical that the bee

scientists and bee researchers have reported. Perhaps a suggested treatment interfered with a fall honey crop, or a planned vacation trip for the beekeeper, or the theory that giving twice the prescribed dose would shorten the treatment time by half, or a thousand other ways to be in conflict with the prescribed treatment made by bee scientists and bee researchers who were PAID by the government, university grants, commercially interested bee companies, or gifts from bee organizations like EAS and ABF.

Has it occurred to anyone that perhaps some of these "problems", new in past 16 years, were in reality beneficial to beekeeping? Many beeHAVERS and surely some of those beeKEEPERS of the past who were too stubborn to change lost many of their bees at some point, bought new bees, lost them a second time, and then GAVE UP and decided to pursue some less humbling hobby or business. In spite of the fact that state upon state testifies that they have less beekeepers in 2001 than they did 16 years ago, the number of people maintaining bees today must be BETTER beekeepers than they were 16 years ago, because government records show that professional honey producers in this country are producing record crops of honey in spite of diminished crop acreage. No longer are "newbies" or beeHAVERS practicing beekeeping as "Daddy did", but they are reading more up-to-date writings about the new treatments, new bees, new management tools, and treating at the TIME recommended rather than at a time personally convenient to them; and these new BETTER BEEKEEPERS are being rewarded by healthy bees and fewer losses of bees.

Another MAJOR help that all this many problems has created is a great deal more investigative research on a few things that had ONLY been mentioned 40-50 years ago but had fallen by the wayside because of lack of commercial interest. Two of these very important things, which I predict will greatly change future beekeeping and remove us from the chore of changing chemicals like we change socks as well as understanding our bees better are: HYGIENIC BEHAVIOR and hence, hygienic bees, which can deal with certain diseases naturally without much beeKEEPER assistance; and increased knowledge about PHEROMONES, not only the QUEEN PHEROMONE, but a WORKER pheromone, and a DRONE pheromone.

It is the DUTY of every beekeeper to CONTACT your Federal legislators, your State legislators, and even your County legislators, and tell them of the importance of the honey bee to human ecology due to honey bee pollination of food for humans, and DEMAND that they support any legislative bill that authorizes more research money about honey bees; and REJECT any legislative bill that authorizes pesticides that can kill honey bees. If you claim to be a BEEKEEPER, GET INVOLVED and help these legislators understand that apis mellifera is NOT a bee like a sweat bee, a Carpenter Bee, or a Bumble bee; and certainly different than the carnivorous Yellow Jack, which is not a bee, but part of the wasp family. How much do you know about law or surgery? Could you defend a thief in court, or could you remove someone's appendix? Of course not! What make you think that an elected legislator knows anything about a honey bee? If he is normal, he knows two things that perhaps his grandmother told him when he was a boy: Honey bees make honey and they STING. Millions of farmers depend upon the honey bee to pollinate their cash crops, and each of these farmers has a VOTE. The

honey bee is the principle pollinator of alfalfa hay, and both dairy cattle and beef cattle need lots of high protein alfalfa hay to make prime beef and rich milk. The loss of honey bees could cause the demise of McDonald's Hamburgers or Baskin-Robbins Ice Cream, and the legislators surely won't get the vote of kids after they become of voting age.

What am I saying? My glass of water is half FULL, not half EMPTY! In my bee association as well as others with whom I am familiar, I find fewer members still trying to "keep bees like Daddy kept bees" and more potential beekeepers buying and studying recent books and articles written by bee scientists, bee researchers, and Master bee-keepers, many more attending those meetings that feature talks by these same highly educated apiarists (To set the record straight: Many Master Beekeepers do not have some fancy college degree, but have proven their "high education about beekeeping" by passing the difficult EAS tests to become a Certified Master Beekeeper). You don't have to be a professional writer to address a letter to a legislator, so send them a letter about the value of honey bee pollination which supplies 35% of the food that humans eat, and who vote for our legislators. Don't let him continue to think that the importance of a honey bee ends with two things: honey and sting. Volunteer a few hours of your time to work at Old Mac Donald's barn at the Montgomery County Fair to tell the public that our bees are not like the "killer bee" movies, and explain their VALUE to our human food supply; and volunteer to talk about honey bees to our children at their schools.

It would not be George if he did not tell you instructions to do something that might keep your bees alive. In Maryland, the BEST time to kill 99% of your tracheal mites is to install 50 grams of menthol in a colony close to August 15th, but before September 1st! Menthol is far and away the best tracheal mite control, but it MUST be installed in hot weather or it will not work. Although today is August 1st, some bees are DYING RIGHT NOW due to lack of food, because of horrible nectar conditions for the past two months. You better check your food supply in each colony TODAY and forget that undependable fall nectar flow. If I told you that I have never lost a colony to Varroa mites, no doubt some people that will say "he is a liar." The fact is, although maintaining as many as 60 colonies these past 16 years, since the tracheal mite, I have never lost a colony to either mite, BUT I HAVE FOLLOWED THE SUGGESTIONS OF BEE SCIENTISTS regarding the best time and how often to treat to kill the greatest percentage of mites rather than selecting a time that is convenient to ME or a time that might not interfere with some nectar collecting. In the central area of Maryland which includes all of the state except the higher elevation western counties, Apistan strips should be installed as late in the year as possible so that the queen has either drastically slowed down in laying new worker eggs or actually stopped laying, and therefore there is little or no bee larvae for the female Varroa mite to lay new mite eggs that can feed on the bee larvae. Hence, I install my Apistan, 1 strip for every 5 frames of brood, on OCTOBER 1st and allow it to stay in place for a full 6 weeks, but surely remove it by December 1st. Too many people say that they stop beekeeping by October and think about it again about April. If you are one of those people, ask yourself "Are you a beeHAVER, or a beeKEEPER?" Some folks are reluctant to try and remove Apistan strips in November for fear that it is too chilly for the bees. Bees are not clustered in a winter cluster at temperatures of over 50F, and there are numerous days in the last half of November, around Thanksgiving time that have

afternoon temperatures of over 50F. This might even mean that you have to leave work for 3-4 hours, come home, and take care of your bees health, just as you take off to go deer hunting, quail shooting, or to a football game. The reason that you definitely DON'T DARE LEAVE THE APISTAN IN PLACE LONGER THAN 6-8 WEEKS is that the longer time is the THING that creates RESISTANT MITES that Apistan cannot kill! TAKE APISTAN OUT BEFORE DECEMBER 1st!

Please make a point of saying "hello" to me at the Montgomery County FAIR, and go to all the fairs that you can to help spread the word about the importance of apis mellifera to our human food supply. By the way, the FAIR has found a good use for this old stroke disabled beekeeper: They have honored me as GRAND MARSHALL of the FAIR PARADE which is held at 6:00 P. M. on Sunday night, August 12th. In spite of difficulty walking, I even have to CROWN the new KING and QUEEN of the FAIR. By the way, the FAIR is making my NEW BEE DEMONSTRATION SCREENED CAGE in Farmer's Triangle section a permanent part of the FAIR. There, four times each day for 9 days, I will open colonies of live bees, show the marked queen to the spectators, talk about bees, their life, their behavior, and their value to the human race while I am dressed only in shoes, shorts, tee-shirt and NO VEIL. As a disabled old man, I need all the help I can get so someone can take my place after my death. Have I got any volunteers to help me or take my place?

George W. Imirie EAS Certified Master Beekeeper

Site Locations for Bees and Honey at the FAIR:

a) Honey, hive products, and display competition is in the Farm and Garden Building #2

b) MCBA booth about Honey Bees, Equipment, Pictures and Observation Hive is in the #1 booth on the west side of Old MacDonald'd Barn, and Master Beekeeper Barry Thompson needs 40 volunteers to do a 4 hour shift of talking to the kids about bees which almost everyone of you CAN do. Please contact Barry at 301 947-4652

c) George's NEW Demonstration Cage and George's Honey House is just 50 yards east of Old MacDonald's Barn in Farmer's Triangle adjoining the John Deere Tractor Display. Why not visit and help George answer all the questions from children and adults, the Number 1 question is always: "Why don't the bees sting you?" or "Aren't you afraid of being stung?" or "Do the bees KNOW you?" My stroke disabled voice can use some help!